

Central Intelligence Agency

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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PALESTINIANS: Prospects for the PLO Summary

In the wake of the Palestine National Council meeting in Amman, PLO Chairman Arafat is continuing efforts to foster a more moderate PLO bloc responsive to his interest in reviving his dialogue with King Hussein over the peace process. The newly appointed PLO Executive Committee is composed of several senior Palestinian figures known for their conciliatory views, including two prominent West Bank mayors deported by Israel. Arafat probably does not expect early breakthroughs toward reaching agreement with Hussein; his concern for the immediate future will be to consolidate control of the PLO before seeking support on the broader negotiation process.

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Although the PLO is badly fractured, Arafat so far has avoided a formal split in the organization despite his defiance of Syria and the radical Palestinians by convening the PNC in Amman. To this end, he eschewed significant policy changes during the PNC conclave and concentrated on organizational changes to strengthen his moderate wing of the PLO. He succeeded in getting the Council's approval to move the PNC headquarters from Damascus to Amman, replace the pro-Syrian PNC Chairman, Khalid Fahum, with the pro-Jordanian Abd al-Hamid Sayeh and appoint two prominent deported West Bank mayors, Muhammad Milhim and Fahd Qawasmah, to the Executive Committee. The final PNC

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resolutions were generally in line with those passed in 1983 in Algiers when all PLO groups attended. [REDACTED]

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Arafat probably believes the inclusion of Milhim and Qawasmah on the Executive Committee will help him to project a more moderate image in the Palestinian community and international arena. Both are well-respected moderates, who have done a good job in the past of presenting the Palestinian cause and may now take on more prominent roles as spokesmen for the new moderate position emerging in the PLO. [REDACTED]

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Putting the PLO House in Order

Several small, pro-Syrian Palestinian groups, which form the National Alliance, have publicly challenged the legitimacy of the Amman meeting, but they have not mounted a counter PNC in Damascus. Members of the Democratic Alliance--including the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine, the two largest PLO groups after Arafat's Fatah--have refused to participate officially in an alternative PNC in Damascus, just as they refused to attend the session in Amman. The Democratic Alliance continues to emphasize PLO unity, however. [REDACTED]

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The Popular and Democratic Fronts' reluctance to line up with the Syrian-dominated National Alliance encourages Arafat to believe he can ultimately resolve his differences with the two groups led by George Habbash and Nayif Hawatimah. Arafat is holding open seats for both groups on the new PLO Executive Committee. [REDACTED]

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The leaders of the Popular and Democratic Fronts disagree over reconciliation with Arafat. US Embassy officials report that Democratic Front leader Hawatimah is prepared to meet with Fatah representatives even if the Popular Front objects. Hawatimah reportedly is inclined to accept the new Executive Committee, but is undecided over accepting a seat. The Popular Front's George Habbash has taken a tougher stance toward Arafat, although others in Habbash's group may be willing to accept Arafat's continued leadership. [REDACTED]

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Arafat apparently has written off the Syrian-dominated Palestinian National Alliance, probably believing that the radical Alliance will have only marginal influence if he reconciles with Hawatimah and Habbash. The PLO chief has not ruled out the possibility of improving relations with Syria, however. His PNC success probably will give him more confidence in facing up to the Syrians and in seeking President Assad's agreement not to undermine Arafat's PLO leadership. [REDACTED]

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PLO Strategy on Peace Process

In addition to consolidating his leadership position, Arafat also will renew discussions with King Hussein on a joint approach to peace negotiations. Arafat clearly sees a renewed dialogue

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with Hussein as important to help focus international attention on the PLO. He may also want to associate the PLO more closely with Jordan and Egypt in order to gain protection from his Syrian opponents. [REDACTED]

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Arafat probably does not feel pressed to make any firm commitments on peace negotiations in the near term. He is confident that Hussein will not enter negotiations without Palestinian backing and that West Bank leaders are not likely to challenge his leadership role for now. US Embassy reporting indicates West Bankers are more supportive of Arafat now that he has demonstrated his independence from Syria and the radical Palestinians. They are encouraged by Arafat's inclusion of West Bankers on the new PLO Executive Committee and apparently are willing to give him another chance to work out an accommodation with Hussein. [REDACTED]

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Senior Arafat aides have stated that they agree in principle with King Hussein's proposal for a joint peace initiative. They reject, however, Hussein's insistence that UNSC Resolution 242 be the basis for discussions because it only refers to the Palestinians as a refugee problem. Arafat may urge consideration of a new UNSC resolution focusing on Palestinian self-determination. [REDACTED]

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One Palestinian official has suggested that the PLO would be willing to accept all UN resolutions that call for the creation of Jewish and Palestinian states. He says the PLO has indicated its support for the draft July 1982 Franco-Egyptian resolution, which affirms 242, and the Brezhnev plan envisaging recognition and diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. He also indicated the PLO would accept 242 on condition that the US guarantees its implementation. [REDACTED]

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Divergent views of a future West Bank-Jordan linkage will be a central topic in a renewed Arafat-Hussein dialogue. Hussein sees a federation under Hashemite rule, but Arafat envisions a loose confederation in which an independent Palestinian state would only later be joined to Jordan. [REDACTED]

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Arafat also is likely to push for an agreement allowing PLO participation in negotiations, even though he knows it is unacceptable to Israel. He may eventually acquiesce to a joint Jordanian/Palestinian negotiating team if the PLO is permitted a behind-the-scenes role in selecting West Bank participants and is allowed frequent consultations during negotiations. [REDACTED]

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Arafat's desire for an enlarged PLO presence in Jordan will be another highly contentious issue. Hussein remains acutely suspicious of Arafat because of his central role in fomenting the Jordanian-Palestinian fighting in Jordan in 1970-1971. Hussein probably will resist a significant PLO expansion for fear it may facilitate increased Palestinian cross-border operations against Israel, risking Israeli retaliation. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

Arafat has survived yet another challenge to his authority, with the vast majority of the Palestinian community and most Arab states still supportive of his leadership position. He may eventually reconcile with the Democratic Front and at least keep Habbash's Popular Front from openly allying with Syria. Even so, he probably will find that members of both Fronts have not abandoned their efforts to impose restrictions on his freedom to maneuver as PLO leader. [REDACTED]

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Arafat is likely to encounter renewed PLO dissidence if he appears to move toward Hussein's position on Mideast peace negotiations. Fatah leaders may not back an agreement with Hussein that compromises or renders ambiguous the Palestinian role in negotiations. Several Fatah Central Committee members still oppose Jordanian representation of the Palestinians and almost certainly will encourage Arafat to hold out for an active PLO role in negotiations as they did in April 1983 when the Hussein-Arafat dialogue last broke down. [REDACTED]

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Syria and its Palestinian surrogates in the National Alliance will try to discourage Hussein and Arafat from pursuing their dialogue by attacking moderate Palestinian and Jordanian interests. Jordan's second ranking diplomat in Bucharest was assassinated in early December and several other attempts against Jordanian targets have recently miscarried. President Assad is likely to step up such attacks if he believes Arafat and the King are nearing an agreement that ignores Syrian interests. [REDACTED]

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